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JIM GARRISON

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Garrison, Backer in 'Plot' Spat

By LESLIE H. WHITTEN

WASHINGTON, March 29—District Attorney Jim Garrison's chief financial backer says that Garrison told him even he—the backer—was not immune from indictment in the bizarre New Orleans "conspiracy" case.

Automobile distributor Willard E. Robertson acknowledged in a telephone interview yesterday that Garrison asked him, "How would you like to be indicted?" But Robertson denied it was a threat. He called it a "mere statement of fact." Garrison could not be reached.

What made Garrison's alleged statement to Robertson peculiar—in a case already fully loaded with peculiarities — was that there hae been no indication that Robertson was involved in any facet of the Kennedy assassination "conspiracy."

On the contrary, it was Robertson, as chairman of "Truth and Consequences, Inc." — a group of businessmen backing the probe—who kicked in $2,500 of his own money to keep the probe going. Since then, he has helped raise $7,000 more for Garrison's efforts.

THANK-YOU NOTES

When reached yesterday, Robertson said his own secretary was typing thank-you letters to contributors at that very moment for Garrison's signature.

The Garrison reminder that even his chief "angel" could be called before the grand jury now hearing parts of the "conspiracy" came when Robertson sopke to Garrison about an acquaintance of Robertson's, Gordon Novel, 29, now dodging an arrest order as a material witness.

As Robertson told it, and as a tape recording made by Novel confirms, Novel called from his hideaway to Robertson in New Orleans a week ago to find out what Garrison was up to. Robertson assured Novel that he had spoken with the flamboyant district attorney about Novel.

The auto man gently suggested to Garrison that Novel thought the subpoena against him was "uncalled for" and Garrison said "Well, I'm calling the shots" as Robertson told it.

Robertson then said:

"He (Garrison) also told me . . . 'I even got a notice in the mail today that I should investigate you.' He said 'How would you like to go before the grand jury,' and I said it wouldn't bother me a . . . bit, not one . . . bit."

CRANK MAIL

Robertson confirmed pertinent sections of the taped conversation. He added that he and Garrison were discussing "crank mail" when Garrison made his statement. At another point, Robertson confirmed, Garrison said, "How would you like to be indicted," and Robertson replied, "don't mind a . . . bit."

Although the tape indicates that Robertson and Garrison were heated in their exchange, Robertson said that this was not so. He said he was shocked and upset that Novel, whom he has known since 1961, had taped their conversation, but said "I think he'll tell you the truth."

"I told Novel that the smartest thing he could do is to come back to New Orleans and face the music," Robertson said. Bond has been set at $50,000 for Novel by a New Orleans judge.

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